

Congresswoman Kosmas Fights for Education Funding in Recovery Package

Urges Conferees to Restore Original Education Investment Levels

(Washington, DC) — Congresswoman Suzanne Kosmas (FL-24), along with 20 of her freshman colleagues, sent a letter today to House conferees urging the restoration of important education investment in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The Senate, which passed its version of the bill yesterday, cut funding for state education budgets as well as school construction and modernization.

"Florida is facing a growing budget crisis and our schools are paying the price," said Congresswoman Kosmas. "The education funding levels in the original recovery package would create jobs, prevent teacher layoffs and help us provide Florida's children with a 21st century education."

The Senate version of the recovery package cut \$20 billion in school construction and modernization funding, including an estimated \$13 million for Brevard County, \$42 million for Orange, \$8 million for Seminole, and \$13 million for Volusia. The original House bill also contained \$79 billion to stabilize state budgets, with an estimated \$3.5 billion for the state of Florida, which would help prevent teacher layoffs and other education cuts. The Senate bill cuts this funding to \$39 billion.

However, the Senate bill does contain a Maintenance of Effort waiver that would allow Florida to receive its fair share of fiscal stabilization funds even though the state does not meet 2006 education spending levels. Kosmas had earlier called on the Senate to ensure that Florida not be punished due to the state's on-going budget crisis.

"No matter what the final investment levels are, it is critical that Florida gets its fair share of education funding," added Kosmas.

The full text of the letter to conferees can be found below:

February 11, 2009

Dear Chairmen Obey, Rangel and Waxman and Ranking Members Lewis and Camp:

As you work to reconcile the House and Senate passed versions of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, we urge you to protect taxpayers, teacher jobs, and the futures of our children by including the House's more robust

levels of education funding in your conference report.

With America's economy facing its toughest times since World War II and tax revenues plummeting, states now face a \$91 billion education funding shortfall. Without correction, this gap will lead to teacher layoffs, higher state and local taxes, and a drop-off in resources for classroom instruction. At a time when the federal government is proposing to address the economic recession with a package of tax cuts and stimulus spending, it makes no sense to have states simultaneously raise taxes and cut spending. In addition, deep cuts to state and local education budgets would deny a quality education to and limit future earnings for thousands, and have long-term negative impacts on our economic productivity.

In negotiations over the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, both House and Senate leaders proposed, and the House has passed, \$140 billion in aid for education, including \$79 billion to stabilize states' finances, \$14 - \$16 billion to improve and repair public school facilities, \$13.1 billion for Title I classroom assistance, \$13.6 billion for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and \$2.1 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start. However, the legislation passed by the Senate on February 10 cuts \$70 billion from the initial bicameral proposal.

Specifically, the Senate cuts \$40 billion for state fiscal stabilization meant to protect teacher jobs and stave off tax hikes, eliminates \$20 billion that would fund school construction and create 200,000 jobs, and strikes over \$1 billion from Head Start.

The importance of the education funding provided in the House version is fourfold: It prevents state and local tax increases, it prevents teachers from being laid off, it creates jobs, and it protects the future of our children and our economy. Economists and scientists agree: Strategic, targeted investments in education are needed to create jobs, give America's children the skills they need to compete globally, and to put our economy back on the road to recovery.

We strongly urge you to remain mindful of our economic recovery, the jobs of our teachers and the futures of our children, and retain the House passed education funding levels in your conference report for the Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

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